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ABSTRACT

This position paper asserts that citizens must reclaim responsibility for and power over public affairs. The New Citizenship calls on all people to reassert common agency and to repossess democratic institutions through popular sovereignty that is the root of democracy. The volume includes the following chapters: (1) "Background"; (2) "Call for a New Citizenship"; (3) "The Challenge"; (4) "The New Citizenship: Civic Stories"; (5) "From 'Me' to 'We': The Lessons of Civic Stories"; (6) "The American Civic Forum"; and (7) "About the 'Civic Declaration'; Reflections of Civic Leaders." (EH)

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CIVIC DECLARATION

A Call for a New Citizenship

A New Citizenship Project of the American Civic Forum

December 9, 1994

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An Occasional Paper of the Kettering Foundation

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Civic Declaration

"In a neighborhood dispute there may be stunts, rough words, and even hot insults; but when a whole people speaks to its government, the dialogue and the action must be on a level reflecting the worth of that people and the responsibility of that government."

— Martin Luther King, John Lewis, James Farmer, and other civil rights leaders, on the purpose of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963

An Occasional Paper of the
Kettering Foundation

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Civic Declaration is in the public domain; its duplication and distribution are encouraged.

Background

The American Civic Forum includes many diverse points of view about questions such as the appropriate role of government and the market in our social and public life; we, the undersigned, do not all agree with all elements in the following stories or all the nuances of emphasis. Yet we are joined together by a common commitment to an understanding of citizenship, politics, and public life with greater dignity and productiveness than that which now prevails.

The Civic Declaration *has been coordinated by Harry Boyte, with Benjamin Barber and Will Marshall. It benefits especially from the contributions of Carmen Sirianni, Research Director of the American Civic Forum, and from the comments of Heather Booth, David Cohen, Dorothy Cotton, William Diaz, Walter Enloe, Diane Eisenberg, Amitai Etzioni, Lew Friedland, Jeff Isaac, Nancy Kari, Joyce King, Anthony Massengale, David Mathews, Deborah Meier, Miaisha Mitchell, Bill Moyers, John Parr, Jay Rosen, William Schambra, Nan Skelton, Edward Skloot, Gerald Taylor, and Robert Woodson. The New Citizenship emerged from* Reinventing Citizenship, *a project of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship in association with the Walt Whitman Center, to make recommendations for strengthening citizen-government partnerships, especially at the federal level. Copies of this* Civic Declaration *are available from the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, Humphrey Institute, 301 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55455; and the Walt Whitman Center, Hickman Hall, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903. For a copy of* Reinventing Citizenship, *the Report to the Ford Foundation on the first six months of this effort, please write the Center for Democracy and Citizenship.*

Call for a New Citizenship

We, the signers of this *Civic Declaration*, representing a mosaic of communities, occupations, cultures, and perspectives, call for a New Citizenship in America. We believe that we as citizens must reclaim responsibility for and power over our nation's public affairs.

The New Citizenship to which we commit ourselves is open,

diversified, inclusive, and nonpartisan: a civic forum comprising every segment of America. But it is not a stand-in for any and every kind of activity. It is the provenance neither of the state-centered Left, which thinks government can solve every problem, nor the market-centered Right, which believes in the social power of the "invisible hand." It is skeptical, both of the "technocratic center" where faith resides in experts, and of talk show democracy, whose politics of grievance and self-righteousness distorts public discussion, confounding democracy with demagoguery.

Rather, the New Citizenship seeks a return to government of and by as well as for the people, a democracy whose politics is our common public work: where citizens are as prudent in deliberation as we expect our representatives to be; where public problem solving takes the place of private complaint; where all give life to liberty, and rights are complemented by the responsibilities that make them real. A citizen democracy turns blame of others into self-reliance and mutual aid. It transforms passive clients and consumers into active agents of change in our communities, the nation, and the world. It seeks the return of authority from unaccountable structures to the public and to community and civic associations, and the renewal of government and civic institutions alike as sites for public work.

We speak from the vantage point of a "third sector" — that vibrant array of voluntary associations, religious congregations, schools and colleges, the free press, professional groups, and community organizations that mediate between government and the market — which has shown time and again in American history that there are immense possibilities for public experiment and for civic work. We encourage the civic dimension of every identity — the renewal of the citizen-politician, the truly "civil" civil servant, civic professional, civic-minded businessperson, religious leader, union activist, community organizer, and citizen-soldier. We reassert the authority of civic and community life against the encroachments of government, however well intended. We also claim the importance of civic and community life against the impact of unfettered markets, however efficient.

We commit ourselves to a common citizenship that honors

difference and incorporates diversity. From the myriad races, cultures, and communities of interest that are America, we draw shared values rooted not in sameness, but in the common ground of our shared tasks and obligations to future generations. We regard our diversity as a strength for practical problem solving, and we challenge those who respond to it with a polarizing politics of fear. Citizenship is a bond that holds potential to unite people of radically diverse backgrounds, ages, and viewpoints. It allows us to enter public life with equal dignity, no matter what our social or economic status.

The New Citizenship calls on all Americans to reassert common agency and to repossess democratic institutions. We invite our fellow citizens to grasp the popular sovereignty that is the root of our democracy and to make it real in our everyday lives. We ask America to be America.

The Challenge

"I know of no safe repository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."

— Thomas Jefferson

Americans today are in an anxious and angry mood. Our country is entering unfamiliar terrain. Our institutions seem incapable of adequate response.

Since the New Deal, our national life has been organized around big institutions: big government, big business, big labor. But the twin forces of globalization and decentralization are undermining those institutions and the old social bargains they embody. For example, the integration of our national economy into the global marketplace erodes Washington's ability to mediate between capital and labor and to assure economic stability.

New information technologies put a premium on intellectual rather than mechanical skills. These technologies offer lu-

crative opportunities to our best-educated workers. But they threaten the secession of a conceptual class of workers from the lives, experiences, and neighborhoods of other citizens, while they leave poor citizens farther behind, intensifying class and racial divisions.

Meanwhile, the breakdown of family, neighborhood, and social networks, the erosion of values of hard work, self-reliance, and personal and community responsibility deplete the cultural strengths we need to cope with fundamental economic change. Instead of trying to fashion new approaches to these dramatic developments, elected leaders all too often defend existing programs and policies, even when it is clear they are not working. Politics as usual is a rehash of yesterday's ideological battles. Meanwhile, tomorrow's problems accumulate largely unaddressed.

Little wonder that public confidence in our political system and government has plummeted. Yet it makes little sense to expect government to solve our problems for us or to blame government for everything that goes wrong.

Rather than rail against politics, Americans need to act like citizens. We need a new burst of civic activism and innovation. We need to get down to the business of working together on our common problems.

In America, profound political changes come not from political elites but from an engaged citizenry. Adapting our national institutions, private and public, to the new realities we face is a task well beyond the capacity of government. It is not for technocrats or a professional political class. It is the job of all Americans, exercising our sovereign power as citizens.

The New Citizenship represents a fresh choice for Americans frustrated by a sterile public debate framed in stark polarities: Left versus Right; public versus private; government versus the market. It speaks from the vantage of America's "third sector" — the myriad civic enterprises, religious, educational, voluntary, press, business, labor, and charitable organizations that mediate between citizens, government and the market.

It was here, in the realm of civil society, that the French observer Alexis de Tocqueville located the genius of American democracy during his travels across the country in the nineteenth century; he found that genius in our emphasis on voluntary associations, on mutual aid versus dependence on the state, on civic equality, and on enterprise. It is here that we must look again today for the moral energy and cultivation of civic leadership needed to tackle our problems.

Yet America's civic sector has long been in eclipse. Its purview has been squeezed by the excesses of an overarching government and the market's "invisible hand." Its civic spirit has been drained by the rise of a narrow expertise in which professionals deliver services to clients and people lose the experience of working together on common projects. The steady growth of central government and a narrowly understood professionalism has increasingly concentrated power in the hands of technocratic elites. These factors have eroded civic virtues of responsibility and self-reliance, and have usurped the problem-solving roles of community institutions. Meanwhile, they have undermined the confidence and larger purpose of professionals themselves, who find their work increasingly narrow, specialized, and devoid of broad civic meaning.

The politics of redistribution has encouraged Americans to demand ever-expanding rights and entitlements from government without assuming corresponding responsibilities to the commonweal. By converting citizens into special pleaders for government favors, it has diminished the office of citizenship while threatening to bankrupt the country. The pursuit of justice remains critical, but it must be pursued in the context of rooted communities, public conversation and public work, rather than escalating demands on the state for redistribution and redress.

If the Left remains wedded to government action in pursuit of distributive justice, the Right seems oblivious to the destructive impact on civil society of rapacious competition. When factories close and move overseas, whole communities are devastated. People lose their jobs and homes. Businesses close. Families come under tremendous strain. The global economy's redistribution of jobs and wealth has dev-

astated many urban and rural areas alike, driving minority employment in inner cities to staggering heights. The absence of jobs that can support a family has contributed to the sharp erosion of family life and marriage in many low-income and working-class communities. The pervasive impact of an entertainment media peddling violence, materialism, and sex without responsibility often overwhelms parents' attempts to instill sound values in their children. The mass culture today derogates the civic wisdom and diverse traditions of civic responsibility found in America's minority and poor communities, expressed through music, storytelling, practical survival strategies that elders have relied on during hard times, and the ways elders have struggled — and still struggle — to save a nearly lost generation of youth.

In calling for a New Citizenship, we seek to reassert the authority of civil society against both the encroachments of government, however well intended, and the disruptions of unfettered markets, however efficient.

We share the public's growing disenchantment with bureaucracy that creates a chasm between a professional governing class and ordinary citizens. Bureaucracy today permits technocrats to control both the definition of public problems and the means chosen to address them — often in public sector monopolies loathe to share decision making or resources with intended beneficiaries. It puts a premium on narrow expertise rather than the wisdom and common sense of citizens.

We share the public's anger and dismay with a press that emphasizes the negative, polarized conflicts and trivial pursuits, rather than the strengths and stories that show ways to solve our common problems.

We believe that it is time for citizens to rebel against the know-it-all "expertocracy" in the name of restoring democracy.

The New Citizenship advocates a basic transfer of power away from central bureaucracies, public and private, to citizens and civic institutions. We believe that decentralizing decision making is more genial to our country's democratic spirit and tradition than the "command and control" hierarchies

of big government and big business.

The New Citizenship advocates a new role for government. Instead of mainly providing services and making top-down decisions, government should act as a catalyst for broader civic efforts. It should provide tools for citizens and communities to solve their own problems.

The New Citizenship envisions a larger role for the mediating institutions of civil society — religious congregations, community and voluntary organizations, service clubs — in tackling America's toughest social problems: poverty, welfare dependence, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and crime. This involves the renewal of civic institutions as sites for public solving, as well as for skill-building and experimentation with new, broader civic roles. We call for a conscious intentionality among civic institutions to renew their larger public mission.

Unlike government programs that are organized around people's deficiencies, such institutions, when they function well, reflect people's individual capacities and communal strengths within frameworks of community norms and standards. Bureaucratic compassion has proven a poor substitute for the nurturance and moral education traditionally provided by families and communities.

The New Citizenship rejects the old politics of entitlement in favor of new politics of reciprocal responsibility. Citizens who receive public benefits should give something back to their community and country. We believe the AmeriCorps service program embodies such a civic compact, offering educational opportunity in exchange for work of value to communities.

The New Citizenship defines itself not in terms of performing occasional civic duties such as paying taxes or jury duty, but in terms of ongoing public work. Practical contribution through collaborative public problem solving, whether in one's paid profession or job, community effort or volunteer service, is critical to active citizenship.

In order to solve public problems, we must develop certain

civic capacities: how to listen, to respect differences, to work with those with whom we disagree and share little in common, to be frank about interests, and to be willing to negotiate and compromise in order to advance larger public goals. The New Citizenship avoids the sanctimonious moralism of "rights talk" and the therapeutic, personalized language used by experts to obscure questions of accountability, power, and values.

Finally, the New Citizenship offers a unifying creed for a nation struggling to build a strong multiethnic and cross-generational democracy amidst incredible diversity. The New Citizenship invites the youth of America to full partnership as we rebuild America together. We reject the new identity politics that divides Americans along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual practice. Rights and responsibilities inhere in individuals, not in groups; the attributes of citizenship, expressed through diverse traditions, are the common denominators that allow us to work together across our differences. A robust ethos and practice of citizenship is an essential antidote to the growing balkanization of America today.

The New Citizenship: Civic Stories

"The state is as real as the people who compose it. The duties of citizenship are as definite as the duties of housekeeping. Only as these self-evident facts are fully appreciated will women be able to share in the many and splendid reforms which we can see must come in our life."

— Jane Addams, Cary Chapman Catt, and other authors of Women's Citizens Library, 1913

A vision of active, practical citizenship for our time builds directly on recent decades of experience. America is an immense laboratory of democratic initiative and problem solving by ordinary citizens. Stories of civic action and deliberation are often out of sight. But, when brought to light, they create a vast mosaic of public possibility. A sampling follows, representing a mix of constituencies and settings:

Civic Journalism. A movement has emerged recently in

the media around "civic" or "public" journalism, aimed at bringing citizens into public discussions of politics and policy in a far more active fashion, improving public deliberation, and reconnecting journalists to the communities they serve. For instance:

- ***Wichita People Project:*** A "founding parent" of the civic journalism movement. After experiments with in-depth election coverage in 1990 the *Wichita Eagle* in 1992 began a "People Project" aimed at involving citizens in public problem solving. It joined with a network TV affiliate and a commercial radio station to challenge citizens "to share ideas about how to regain control over the systems that control our lives," exploring the "core values" at the heart of political controversies, creating forums for discussion of practical strategies and ideas for action.

- ***We the People:*** Beginning in the 1992 elections and now continuing between elections, Wisconsin Public Television joined with the *Wisconsin State Journal* in Madison, and later with WISC, the CBS affiliate, and Wisconsin Public Radio, to develop an approach that stresses in-depth public capacity-building on issues facing the communities, ranging from health to gambling. Public forums broadcast on the air are preceded by coordinated efforts to cover particular issues and the sponsorship of citizen discussion groups — all resulting in highly knowledgeable questions and conversation from a lay perspective. The aim is to help produce a deliberative public in Wisconsin.

- ***NPR Election Project:*** The Election Project at National Public Radio has developed collaborative partnerships between NPR affiliates and local newspapers (and in some cases, television stations) in five large cities, to have citizens "lead in the election coverage" this year. The project uses a combination of surveys, discussions, forums, and other approaches to shape coverage of candidates. John Dinges, project director, says the most intriguing issue is about authority: citizens aren't customary "experts," as his skeptical colleagues in the media point out. So with what authority do they speak?

Dinges says, citizens speak with the authority of democratic questions, and citizen common sense, not the vantage of expert answers.

Community Action. Community development and action groups have dramatically evolved over the past two decades. National intermediary organizations like the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Enterprise Foundation, and the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation (NRC) have helped to facilitate powerful stories of low-income development around housing, commercial revitalization, and human service delivery. Large action networks have developed in ways that create a highly sophisticated base of creative initiative in many of America's poorest communities, for a collaborative, deliberative, problem-solving politics that brings together diverse racial, religious, political, and economic interests.

- ***Industrial Areas Foundation:*** The oldest coalition of community organizations in the country, the IAF is comprised of 41 affiliates including many of the nation's largest and most effective community groups. The majority of these groups are religious congregations and labor unions found in some of the nation's poorest areas. In San Antonio, Texas, the COPS organization, now 20-years-old, "saved the city" by bringing hundreds of millions of dollars of infrastructure improvement into the barrios and allowing the "creation of centrist policies," according to former Mayor Henry Cisneros, now secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. East Brooklyn Churches has created over 2,500 single family "Nehemiah Homes," in one of New York's most ravaged areas. Baltimore's BUILD brought school administrators, city officials, the business community, and churches together to create the "Commonwealth Agreement," guaranteeing every high school graduate economic support for college or a job opportunity. Shelby County Interfaith in Memphis, Tennessee, has brought 50 congregations, half black and half white, together on a variety of job creation, adult education, housing and crime prevention initiatives. In the process, the organization has made dramatic gains in healing the public wounds that afflicted Memphis in the aftermath of Mar-

tin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968. The key to the success of all IAF groups, according to its leaders, is the development of the civic and public leadership capacities in individuals, institutions, and communities. IAF describes its broadest goal as creating "public spaces," and "educating ordinary people for public life," through the skills of everyday politics.

- ***National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise:*** Effective community action defies political labels. While IAF — a nonpartisan network — is sometimes described as tilting toward "moderate progressives" in politics, the National Center is seen as connected largely with community-oriented Republican officeholders. But like the IAF, the National Center works with any politician, regardless of ideology, who supports programs for empowerment of local grassroots and low-income communities. It assists organizing efforts like Cochran Gardens in St. Louis — a once-decimated housing project that is now a beautiful community run by tenants, with a variety of associated businesses and community-based social services. It gives support and visibility to efforts like the Chad School in Newark — an inner-city private school named after a small African country from which virtually all students (98 percent) go onto post-high school education. "No student fails!" is the Chad School's motto; it is dedicated to "empowering community folk to show inner-city youth they can achieve and succeed."

- ***Unlikely Coalitions:*** As a part of the emerging civic politics, unlikely coalitions have emerged across the country to address public problems. In this way, they not only come up with innovative approaches to difficult problems but they also build respect and trust across bitter divisions and detoxify public discourse. Common Ground, an initiative which the Advocacy Institute initially helped to catalyze, has brought pro-choice and pro-life sides of the abortion issue together. The two sides agree to disagree about abortion, and focus on issues that they can agree on: those that benefit women and children like adoption, foster care, and the securing of adequate prenatal services. In Los Angeles, BUILDING

UP, a service coalition that received one of the initial Summer of Service grants from the Clinton administration, has created a working partnership among a strikingly diverse group of 40 institutions, ranging from inner-city churches to five area colleges and large organizations like the Red Cross, the Watts Health Foundation and the Drew Child Development Corporation. BUILDING UP involves shared governance, strong youth participation, and a focus on combining community service with development of civic skills.

Public Deliberation. New forms of public deliberation have multiplied over the last decade, retrieving older practices of public conversation that allow people with diverse points of view to deepen and broaden their perspectives on public issues (what John Adams called at the nation's founding, "the ripening of public judgment"). These forums are vivid alternatives to radio talk shows where people sound off or yell at each other, or conventional public opinion polls, which usually just canvass private individual views.

- ***National Issues Forums:*** The forums, or "NIF" for short, facilitated by the Kettering Foundation and Public Agenda, now include several thousand community-based groups, which each year explore different perspectives on critical public issues. NIF is explicitly designed as a process that cultivates and deepens "public judgment," rather than simply private opinion; and it involves citizens in many settings learning how to make hard choices from competing goods. NIF groups vary enormously, ranging from churches and literacy programs to community colleges and prison study circles. At Fresno City College, forum discussions have become a regular part of the curriculum for Spanish-speaking students. In Michigan, the Grand Rapids NIF is an alliance of 67 groups including the Catholic Diocese, Cooperative Extension, the Salvation Army, schools, and the YWCA. The forum for Kalamazoo County, with a membership of 500, has adapted deliberative conversation to many local issues facing the community, from health care and economic development to the most helpful design of the Information Infrastructure to assist citizens in solving problems.
- ***American Health Decisions:*** The Health Decisions

network, initially formed in Oregon, now includes tens of thousands of citizens in 19 states conversing about choices, priorities, and values for health care. Georgia Health Decisions has created a conversation stretching from many inner-city communities to professional and business groups. California Health Decisions Values Project has created a partnership with a number of media outlets to stimulate public discussion of health policy options, with over 500 community meetings held in 1992-1993.

- ***Central Oklahoma 2020:*** Citizens in 20 cities and 4 counties in the central Oklahoma region participated in a deliberative regional planning process, facilitated by the National Civic League. Discussions brought young people, the elderly, elected officials, business owners, clergy, immigrants, educators, and many others together to develop action and strategy plans for their future, which identified priorities such as the creation of neighborhood-based support systems for families and quality day care.

Education and Youth Development. From the burgeoning community service movement to schools that have reclaimed a strong civic mission for educating young people in the skills and values of public life and the demanding jobs of the future, a diverse, growing movement has spread across the country that is premised on belief in the capacities of all young people for positive contribution. Signs appear in the largest networks of a new interest in strong, practical citizenship. The National Council for the Social Studies has made the theme "Developing the Citizen Child" central to its 75th convention. Many local examples of creative education have developed:

- ***Central Park East:*** CPE, a cluster of elementary and secondary schools in inner-city New York, was launched in 1974 as an experimental effort to build a heterogeneous educational community that succeeds for all students. Today, almost all students who complete the sixth grade at CPE schools graduate from high school. Central Park East schools' success rests on three principles: teachers help students develop individualized "pathways

to learning," based on interests that students bring from their home and community environments as well as those discovered in classrooms; students are cared about as complex, multidimensional human beings; and parents are strongly involved in school curriculum design and in the educational process.

- ***The Ella Baker Academy:*** The Academy, part of the New York State Martin Luther King Commission and the Institute for Nonviolence, trains 100 inner-city teenagers each year in principles of nonviolence and social change skills. It is a project that has become a model for many communities.

- ***Minnesota 4-H Extension:*** Minnesota Extension Service's 4-H program, involving more than 240,000 children and teenagers across the state, has undertaken an intensive process of citizenship education over the past four years, applying to a variety of its programs the civic education approach called "citizen politics," created by Project Public Life, a grassroots civic education effort based at the Humphrey Institute. As youth have learned to think of themselves as effective citizens developing public skills through their work, volunteers and staff report a substantial deepening of the sophistication and seriousness of projects like Community Pride, a 4-H youth problem-solving program that has more than 20,000 participants each year.

This array of stories illustrates the process of civic renewal and ferment that has become evident in many other settings as well. Foundations have begun to take on a citizenship theme. Civic-minded foundations range from the working group which the Lilly Endowment organized, aimed at bringing a strong citizenship focus to the community service movement, to the executive seminar on "civic investing," organized by the Kettering Foundation, the Council of Foundations, and the Philanthropy Center. Major foundations such as the Surdna Foundation and the Haas Fund have recently developed new program areas on "effective citizenship" and "citizenship and civic education."

A new generation of innovative leadership — what might be

called "citizen politicians" — has begun to appear at every level of government, interested in innovative approaches to working with citizens. The National Civic League reports growing interest among elected officials in "citizen democracy" — ways to engage citizens more actively in governance and public policy; its American Renewal Project highlights stories of citizen-government partnership, and has drawn support from a large number of organizations. The Communitarian Network, building on ferment in communities and on academic discussions alike, has recently found wide response to its proposals for a renewed balance between rights and responsibilities in public policy. The Progressive Policy Institute's proposals for decentralization and policy attentive to community networks and public reciprocity — where people are expected to give something back for public benefits — have similarly had appeal across normal political divisions. The League of Citizens' Leadership Training Council reports that over the last two years, workshops on citizen involvement and new styles of political leadership were far oversubscribed. Local efforts have appeared like the Ramsey County government's Reengaging Citizenship Project, which seeks to develop new ways for continuous involvement of citizens in policy and service delivery. Meanwhile, the International Association of Public Participation Practitioners, a network of leaders and staff who design and facilitate citizen involvement in government, has recently rapidly expanded; it aims at "putting the civil back in civil service," in the words of it's president, Jerome Delli Priscoli.

Growing networks of community computing groups and civic technologists have also appeared, as manifest in the recent "Ties that Bind" conference in Cupertino, California, and the important work of such groups as the Center for Civic Networking, the Morino Institute, and FreeNet. These groups are working with community and citizen organizations across the country to design democratic technologies for the information age that will be decentralized, attentive to community needs, and will help facilitate public deliberation and problem solving. In the Boston area, for instance, the Harriet Tubman House, along with literacy, health, and social service programs, has formed a community partnership with WGBH-TV to provide telecommunication services in forms that most help community groups solve real problems.

Finally, citizenship concepts and themes have begun to appear in many other policy arenas and institutional networks. The umbrella group, the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship, has recently grown in membership, and serves as a key communications network among groups in this field. The Independent Sector, bringing together the great range of nonprofit and voluntary groups, has taken a leadership role in promoting citizen involvement. The United Negro College Fund is working with the Whitman Center at Rutgers University to develop ways to evaluate the civic development of students involved in service programs. The YMCA, National Easter Seal Society, and the American Occupational Therapy Foundation are developing civic leadership projects with the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute.

Forms of civic action today are culturally and ideologically diverse, appearing in communities of every racial, religious, cultural, economic, and geographic background. Citizenship in this sense, and the civic politics it generates, has several broad, identifiable characteristics that mark it as an alternative to the politics of complaint, grievance, self-righteousness, and claims to rights detached from responsibility.

From *Me* To *We*: The Lessons of Civic Stories

Most fundamentally, the strands of a New Citizenship renew public life in a society which has seen the erosion of vital public spaces, public spirit, and a sense of the larger public good. Public life is the environment beyond the normal comfort zone of familiarity and similarity of viewpoint and value. It is an arena of exchange, discourse, conflict, mutual respect, and collaborative work. The point is not personal bonding or complete agreement but rather constructive, creative action on common problems. Many different moral frameworks and perspectives are appropriately at the table, with no one dominating. Public life lifts one's horizons toward the longer range, the interconnections among different problems and issues, and the larger public good that is discovered through common effort, but cannot be assumed or declared before the fact. Public life is often challenging and

difficult. But its rewards are part of the human birthright: discovery of the larger world, other kinds of people, and other points of view; freedom and power that comes from impact on the stage of history. These are the elemental ingredients of genuine democracy.

A rich public life, in turn, rests on three key features: a commitment to building the capacities of individuals and communities; an emphasis on deliberative public talk; and a focus on practical problem solving that, without requiring consensus on values, allows diverse players to collaborate in getting things done. Moreover, an important lesson of the most effective civic education and leadership development in recent years is that learning to understand and think through such concepts and their applications is itself a key part of developing citizenship capacities. It is important that people learn to deliberate and work together; it is equally important that they reflect on what "deliberation" is and what it means in practice; or what "public work" means and the opportunities it offers to reengage people now on the margins of public life. Effective civic development is based on the belief that ordinary people can think creatively and flexibly about large political ideas and their applications — people can be theorists of their own lives. This is "Jeffersonian democracy" for the information age.

Beyond the quick fix: an orientation toward capacity. In a service society professionals are often taught approaches to problem solving that assume the deficiencies and inadequacies of individuals and communities. The New Citizenship reverses the equation.

A capacity orientation means a recognition that all communities hold immense civic potentials. Poor people may be plagued by lack of money, but may still have untapped possibilities for civic contribution. In the poorest communities, mediating institutions, preeminently religious congregations, often play an important role in developing and maintaining social networks, cultivating character and values, and generating hope for change. A robust civic practice needs to recognize the critical role that such mediating institutions play. Civil servants, journalists, health providers, and other professionals need to be trained to understand the rich re-

sources, networks, and capacities to build on, especially in areas conventionally labeled as "at risk" or "culturally deprived." Civic renewal needs to reeducate professionals and community residents alike, to think of their work in more public, collaborative, interactive, and relational terms. Narrow expertise must always be leavened by experience, multiple viewpoints, common sense, and a broader civic perspective. While experts should help to inform policy-making, they should not make policy. In civil service, this is captured by the phrase, "putting the civil back in civil service." In community, it means "experts on tap, not on top."

Beyond the sound bite: **the value of talking things over.** Public life rests on retrieving and reinvigorating the best practices of deliberation that can produce a genuine, democratic public voice. A public voice is common, deliberative, and provisional, based as much on open-ended questions and the skills of listening as it is on the art of presentation. It is very different from uncompromising claims to rights or privileged claims to voice based on one group's special oppression. The public voice is a voice very different than the official talk of government, the specialized language of professions, or the narrowly framed talk of special interests. It rests on a recognition of the many kinds of knowledge — from academic to experiential, moral insight to historical memory — that inform a public judgment. For citizens to develop a public voice we must create an array of public forums in many different environments.

Goodbye to the Lone Ranger: **the importance of collaborative problem solving.** Finally, public life is grounded in the recognition that to solve the main problems we confront as communities and as a society — whether crime or homelessness, environmental pollution or school reform, teen pregnancy or racial conflict, economic development or deterioration of the physical infrastructure — it will be necessary to engage diverse interests, points of view, and moral frameworks. Few problems lend themselves to the either-or, "good versus evil" style of argument that dominates public discussions today. Very few, indeed, can simply be solved by large systems, experts, or professionals. If we are to make much progress, we need an approach to problem solving that taps and cultivates the creativity, common sense, and civic

energy of diverse groups of citizens.

The New Citizenship, building on what has already developed at the grass roots, articulates a vision of politics that belongs to all citizens. The challenge is to move from such rich but separate stories to a new narrative of politics and citizenship.

The American Civic Forum

We envision a loose and open medium called the American Civic Forum to advance the New Citizenship. The American Civic Forum is a potential vehicle for exchanging experiences and enhancing civic work across many environments. It has three broad purposes:

- ***Call for a New Citizenship:*** Building on this *Civic Declaration*, the American Civic Forum will advance a call for a New Citizenship: Americans need to stop complaining and reclaim authority and responsibility for public affairs. The Civic Forum draws from many American traditions, including that which informed our nation's founding moment: the Committees of Correspondence, nongovernmental bodies of ordinary women and men who deliberated about the challenges facing the colonies and took action to ensure a "new dawn of liberty." Like the Committees of Correspondence, the Civic Forum will help to launch a wide-ranging conversation among citizens about the need for the "powers of the republic" to reside in the people themselves. Moreover, it will help us develop and discover what citizenship means in the information age.

- ***Citizen-Government Partnership:*** The American Civic Forum will work with legislative bodies and government agencies that seek citizen-government partnership in problem solving. It will help create a nonpartisan political voice at every level of policy-making that emphasizes civic problem solving and civic capacity-building and the idea of government as a catalytic agent. We believe that the major policy arenas of our time — from health care to education — will be fundamentally reconceived in positive ways by putting citizens at the

center as deliberators and actors, not mainly in the roles of clients and consumers.

- ***Civic Storytelling:*** The American Civic Forum will help to build a network of civic educators, in many settings, dedicated to analyzing and disseminating civic stories as an alternative to the mood of discouragement and despair in America. Civic storytelling, when undertaken in a thoughtful and nonsentimental way, is critical to the public articulation of different models of "hero." It has much to contribute to the nation's public life as compared to the celebrity focus that now predominates. Civic storytelling is also essential to spreading "good news" of civic work and to evaluating best practices. Developing skills of civic storytelling will greatly aid community-oriented health care, the community service movement, community development, education reform, and many other areas. Special attention needs to be focused on youth contributions to public life.

Many of these practices and functions have already been initiated by the emerging constituencies of a New Citizenship. The American Civic Forum is conceived as a diverse and pluralist confederation of groups and individuals dedicated to this citizenship. It will support existing efforts, while it will seek to give them greater visibility and public profile.

The American Civic Forum includes many diverse points of view and perspective about questions such as the appropriate role of government and the market in our social and public life. Overall, the American Civic Forum is joined together by a common commitment to a politics of greater dignity and productiveness than that which prevails today and threatens the civic life of our republic.

About the *Civic Declaration*: Reflections of Civic Leaders

"At a time when the country steams with anger at political leaders and the political system, it is time to focus attention on citizens. We can't be victims, innocent of what is happening in the country. That, as this *Civic Declaration* points out, would be quintessentially un-American. Democratic citizenship is born of people taking responsibility for their common future rather than futilely shouting, "all power to the people." The *Civic Declaration* initiative points to a public that creates its own powers, by claiming and acting on its responsibilities."

— ***David Mathews***
President,
Kettering Foundation

"The *Civic Declaration: A Call for a New Citizenship* is a ringing affirmation of one of the cardinal principles of democracy: Over time, people will not and should not do more for you than you are willing to do for yourself. For politicians to imagine anything less from citizens is to patronize the people. For citizens to imagine anything more from government is to give up our rightful role as sovereigns of the Republic."

— ***Robert Woodson, Sr.***
President,
National Center for
Neighborhood Enterprise

"The 1994 elections signaled the collapse of America's old political order. The tired nostrums of the Left and Right are giving way to a new politics based on civic engagements and responsibility. The *Civic Declaration* is a timely bid by citizens acting as citizens to reclaim power from central institutions and to reinvigorate "the third sector" of civil society."

— ***Will Marshall***
President,
Progressive Policy Institute

"The 1950s and 1960s spawned a network of hundreds of grassroots citizenship classes as an invisible foundation on which the entire civil rights movement was built. In this experience, people discovered their capacity to act on their own behalf with others and to improve the condition of their lives. Perhaps most importantly, African-Americans discovered they

did not have to continue to live as victims at the mercy of segregation. In citizenship classes all across the South, they came to the awareness that if things were to change, if problems were to be solved, they would have to get involved to do it. The lesson is clear. What we did 30 years ago can be done again. All people must see themselves as part of the government, not as outsiders protesting, complaining, criticizing, or being victims. It is urgent that all of us heed this *Call for a New Citizenship*."

— ***Dorothy Cotton, Former Director, Citizenship Education Program Southern Christian Leadership Conference***

"In 1992, the voters rejected passive government. In 1994, the voters rejected domineering, centralized government. Both parties and all Americans need to find a new framework for solving our problems. The *Civic Declaration* presents such a framework. It is based on the ancient principle that government should be the servant, not the master, of the people. The *Civic Declaration* is the key to unlocking creative problem solving. It will shape American politics for the rest of our lives."

— ***Vin Weber***
Vice Chairman, Empower America

"The *Civic Declaration* is an eloquent statement of many of the same goals we seek to achieve. We believe there is a growing recognition in newsrooms around the country that for democracy to flourish there must be a renewal of the robust civic life Tocqueville observed when he toured the United States more than a century ago. For democracy to have the renaissance called for in the *Civic Declaration*, it is necessary for the press and television to engage their viewers and readers as skilled professionals able to provide information that is objective, accurate, and independent. Many journalists share that view and are renewing their own commitment o the ideals of democracy and, in doing so, are reasserting their central place in the public dialogue."

— ***Ed Fouhy***
Director, Pew Center for Civic Journalism

"This citizenship initiative has had three principal effects to date. First, it has raised awareness within the administration of the extent to which the practice of citizenship is imperiled in America today. Second, it has sparked an administration-

wide mobilization of public officials, career civil servants as well as political appointees, who are determined to work together to resist, and if possible, reverse the trends that are so adverse to the hopes and activities of citizens. And finally, the project has set in motion a process that may well lead to an executive order or presidential memorandum establishing a formal forum within the executive branch for considering issues and policies that help or hinder the practice of citizenship. You and your colleagues have every right to take pride in the energy you have unleashed. It has been an honor to host and participate in a number of these meetings on the renewal of citizenship. I hope that our collaboration can continue and bear fruit in the months to come."

— ***William A. Galston***
Deputy Assistant to the
President for Domestic Policy

"Citizens have become voiceless and homeless, caught between a paternalistic government and a special-interest-skewed private sector. Civil society, the domain of active citizenship, has been squeezed out between burgeoning government and growing private markets and the civic voice has been silenced by polarizing political noise and the cacophony of private interests. The *Civic Declaration* breaks away from this two-celled model of bloated government and the special interest private sector, and recaptures the vibrant middle ground of civil society, where citizens can associate voluntarily, yet think publicly, and are thereby empowered to solve public programs themselves. It broadens the framework for citizenship and transforms politics from a spectator sport into a participatory activity."

— ***Benjamin Barber***
Director, Walt Whitman Center,
Rutgers University

"It's easy to blame everyone else for what's wrong with America. Citizens need to be more engaged in a thoughtful way, and differentiate between those trying to solve our problems and those who aren't. We need to be counted among those solving problems. That's what the *Civic Declaration* is all about."

— ***Ellen Hume***
Senior Fellow,
Washington Annenberg Project

"What the American Civic Forum has done with the *Civic Declaration* is to provide a framework and a cast of characters for thoughtful discussion on the terms and conditions of the civic partnership. The meetings, the materials, the individual conversations and the new networks that have developed have all been extremely helpful. I can envision application of the materials and concepts and proposals in a variety of arenas — from health care reform to community and neighborhood development to school reform — as we proceed. I am eager to continue to work with this project as we move from the conceptual design stage to the practical implication over the coming months."

— ***Peter B. Edelman***
Counsellor to the Secretary,
Department of Health and
Human Services

Copies of the *Civic Declaration* are available from the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, Humphrey Institute, 301 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455, and the Walt Whitman Center, Hickman Hall, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

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